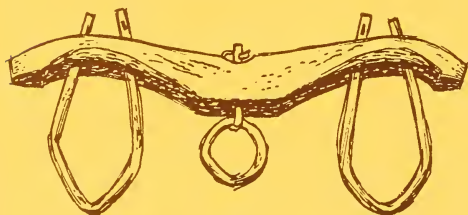


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Lincoln and McCellan


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Lincoln and McClellan



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Lincoln and McClellan

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By
M. L. Houser

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Lincoln and McClellan

Early in 1861, in what is now West Virginia, General George B. McClellan, with 20,000 troops, gained several minor victories over 5,000 Confederates, took 1,000 prisoners, and issued some rhetorical proclamations which appealed to the popular imagination. (1) With the approval of the aged General Winfield Scott, McClellan was called to Washington and given command of the Eastern army, which only recently had been defeated at Bull Run.(2)

McClellan proved himself to be a splendid organizer and driller of troops, he did a good job in fortifying the capital, and he made himself exceedingly popular with his troops by his liberality in granting furloughs.(3)

Unhappily, however, McClellan developed an exaggerated ego, a martyr complex, and a timidity regarding opponents—always over-estimating their number two or three times; all of which made him practically a total loss as a fighter; and the war, if successfully concluded, must be won through fighting.(4) During forty years of discussions and compromises, the situation had steadily grown worse.

McClellan affected to distrust those in authority, especially Lincoln and Stanton; accused them of wishing him to fail; and, after eight long months of preparation, refused, with 180,000 troops, to attack General Johnston, who, with only 47,000 Confederates, was virtually besieging the capital.(5)

Strenuously opposing Mr. Lincoln's plan—later adopted by Grant—of moving directly on Richmond, and thereby keeping his army between the main Confederate army and Washington, McClellan finally advanced by way of the Peninsula of the James and York Rivers, in southeast Virginia.(6)

Taking with him an army of 121,000 men—the largest active army yet assembled on the American continent—and battery after battery of superior artillery, he, upon landing from the transports, permitted himself to be held up for a month by 11,000 Confederates under General Magruder; consumed another two weeks in advancing fifty miles; was reinforced until the total troops that had been placed under his command on the Peninsula numbered 160,000; and when he still had something over 100,000 effectives, was attacked by General Lee, who had succeeded Johnston, with at least 15,000, probably 25,000 fewer soldiers.(7) He was driven back twenty-five miles, with a loss of immense stores, fifty-two cannon, and 15,000 casualties; and he then huddled with his army at Harrison's Landing on the James River, under the protection of Federal gunboats.(8)

Returning, under orders, with his army to Acquia Creek, near

Washington, McClellan remained passive (or worse) while General Pope, defending Washington with the Army of Virginia, was defeated as disastrously as McClellan had been on the Peninsula.(9) McClellan then got what few defeated and discredited generals receive—a second chance.

Believing that McClellan was the best man available to reorganize the disorganized and discouraged troops, and realizing how popular McClellan had made himself with the army, including those favorites whom he had appointed to high positions, Mr. Lincoln, in disregard of the strenuous objections of his cabinet, restored McClellan to command of the troops defending Washington; and also permitted him to command the Army of the Potomac when it followed Lee into Maryland.(10)

There, McClellan had fall into his lap a lost order in which General Lee disclosed that he was contemptuously dividing his little army, while almost within sight of the Federals, for the purpose of capturing 12,000 Union soldiers at Harper's Ferry.(11) McClellan, with 87,000 troops, delayed attacking Lee's 40,000 until Lee had time to complete his Harper's Ferry enterprise and reassemble his forces at Antietam Creek.(12)

Tardily attacking approximately half the number of his own troops "by driblets" and failing to make proper use of 12,500 soldiers commanded by Fitz-John Porter, the best McClellan could, or did, accomplish was a draw, with another 12,000 casualties.(13) Lee's losses of about the same number had been cancelled in advance by his capture of Union troops at Harper's Ferry.(14)

Lee waited a day for McClellan to attack again; then, knowing that the Union army was receiving heavy reinforcements, deliberately and peacefully crossed the Potomac into Virginia, found a good camping ground, awaited reinforcements, and secured supplies for his barefooted soldiers.(15)

Mr. Lincoln did everything he knew how, through appeals, orders, and a personal visit, to induce McClellan to attack Lee, and win a decisive victory, perhaps the war; and, incidentally, thereby rehabilitate himself in the confidence of the country; but McClellan, as usual, contented himself for weeks with making excuses and promises.(16) Finally losing all hope, Lincoln appointed Burnside to the command of the Army of the Potomac, and ordered McClellan to retire to his home at Trenton.(17)

. . .

During this time, General Grant, with hastily trained troops, had won victories in the West at Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Pittsburgh Landing; Farragut had taken New Orleans; and Pope,

with Foote's assistance, had captured Island No. 10 and 6,000 prisoners.(18) But for these successes, the government probably would have collapsed. Small wonder that Lincoln said of Grant: "I can't spare this man; he fights."(19)

. . .

That McClellan's delusions of grandeur, martyr complex, and petulance, reached such proportions as to approach "queerness," even in a young man who had suddenly been shoved into a position beyond his capacity, can be indicated by a few extracts, mostly from letters written to his wife; and nowhere else, probably, does a man reveal his real self so clearly as when he pours out his soul to the woman who thinks that he is "wonderful."

I find myself in a new and strange position here: President, Cabinet, General Scott, and all deferring to me. I seem to have become the power of the land.(20)

I am daily becoming more disgusted with this administration—perfectly sick of it.(21)

I was obliged to attend a meeting of the cabinet at 8 P. M., and was bored and annoyed. There are some of the greatest geese in the cabinet that I have ever seen.

It is sickening in the extreme, and makes me feel heavy at heart, when I see the weakness and unfitness of the poor beings who control the destinies of this great country.(23)

I have not been at home for some three hours, but am concealed at Stanton's to dodge all enemies in the shape of browsing Presidents.(24)

I am tired of serving fools.(25)

(That was) * * * one of the first steps taken to tie my hands in order to secure the failure of the approaching campaign.(26)

Don't worry about the wretches; they have done their worst; and can't do much more. History will present a sad record of those traitors who are willing to sacrifice the country and its army for personal spite.(27)

The President very coolly telegraphed me yesterday that he thought I had better break the enemy's line at once. I was much tempted to reply that he had better come and do it himself.(28)

I feel that the fate of the nation depends on me, and

I feel that I have not one single friend at the seat of government.(29)

When I see such insane folly behind me, I feel that the final salvation of the country demands the utmost prudence on my part.(30)

Anyone who cares for more of that sort of thing should read *McClellan's Own Story*.

. . .

So far as I know, the only alternative to believing that McClellan's remarkable conduct was caused by a faulty temperament is to suppose that, for political reasons, he did not wish the war to be won until such time as the administration might be compelled to make peace with slavery intact; and leave undecided, or settle in favor of the South, other issues which had helped cause the war. According to Williams, in his *Lincoln and the Radicals*, General Randolph B. Marcy, McClellan's father-in-law and chief-of-staff, was supposed by the Radicals to be "in secret sympathy with the Rebellion." (31) He certainly was politically sympathetic with Clement L. Vallandigham, whom Milton classes with "The Disloyal Opposition"; and who, also, as that author says, eventually became chief of the Copperhead fifth column.(32)

Early in July, 1862, after the Union army had been decisively defeated on the Peninsula, and while it was cooped up on the James River under the protection of gunboats, Lincoln visited McClellan; in whom, by that time, practically no one else in the administration had any confidence.(33) The President hoped, probably, that he could by kind counsel induce his disappointing protege to do better.

Instead of trying to defend himself because of his abject failures, McClellan handed Lincoln a long letter in which he advised the President just how the government should be conducted.(34) The most interesting part of this document, which a recent McClellan biographer terms "extraordinary" and "amazing," was the advice that the forcible abolition of slavery should not be considered for a minute; and that the military should not be allowed to impair the authority of masters over slaves; with a covert threat that a failure to heed such advice might lead to the "disintegration" of "our present armies."

In the Army of the Potomac was a Major John J. Key, whose brother was a member of McClellan's staff. Shortly before McClellan was dismissed, Mr. Lincoln was told that Major Key, when asked why the Confederate army was not "bagged" immediately after the battle at Antietam, replied:



Peninsula Campaign

That is not the game. The object is that neither army shall get much advantage over the other till they are exhausted, and we shall make a compromise and save slavery.(35)

When called to account by the President, Key admitted that the report was substantially correct; and he was dismissed from the service.(36)

When the President issued his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 1, 1862, field commanders were instructed to issue copies of it to their troops. The one that McClellan sent out was accompanied by an order which contained this significant sentence:

The remedy for political errors, if any are committed, is to be found only in the action of the people at the polls.(37)

Without direct and conclusive evidence, one hesitates to accuse McClellan, or anyone, of treacherously and deliberately sabotaging efforts of the administration to secure a quick decision; but McClellan's best friends, as it seems to me, must admit that the course he pursued might well have been adopted by anyone who did have that purpose. Such a person, too, would probably voice loudmouthed charges against Lincoln and Stanton, on the theory that a vigorous offensive is usually the best defense. The rule, as everyone knows is: "When you haven't much defense yourself, viciously attack the Prosecuting Attorney."

. . .

Whether McClellan's failures were caused by his constitutional weakness of character, by political considerations, or by both, I insist that those failures were his own; and I deprecate their being charged, even by inference, to treasonable conduct on the part of Lincoln. That thought is neither new nor original. In 1885, over sixty years ago, Hon. William D. Kelley, a member of Congress from 1860 until 1890, and eventually known as "Father of the House," in a brochure entitled *Lincoln and Stanton*, when referring to an article by McClellan then recently published in the *Century*, said:

Abraham Lincoln and Edwin M. Stanton are dead. No member of Mr. Lincoln's cabinet during the Peninsula Campaign is now living. * * * Emboldened by the ravages death has made during nearly a quarter of a century, George B. McClellan avails himself of the *Century* to present his explanation of the failure of the Army of the Potomac while under his command. The initial article * * * is an unjusti-

fiable assault upon the memories of Lincoln and Stanton, and but for this fact would not deserve notice * * *. The statements by which he attempts to make good his assaults upon the memory of the illustrious dead are sustained solely by his word, and would vanish before a freshman's application of the primary cannons of criticism. * * * I submit this (essay) * * * in justice to the illustrious dead, whose memory the writer of that article so wantonly aspersed.(38)

One would suppose that the campaign charges made against Mr. Lincoln, and the excuses made for General McClellan, during the election contest of 1864, would now be forgotten, or would be remembered only with tolerant amusement; but some distinguished historians who sympathize with McClellan continue to assert, or assume, that McClellan was a military genius and a political martyr who was thwarted by a politically-minded Lincoln, aided and abetted by a villainous Stanton.

Probably one of the finest traits in human nature is a disposition to sympathize with the under dog; but I maintain that to defend him by attributing his faults and mistakes to others is neither good history nor good morals.

. . .

In all the insinuations and assumptions that Lincoln, with some help from others, caused McClellan's failure on the Peninsula, the only concrete and specific charge which I have found is that President Lincoln retained McDowell's corps and Blenker's division for the defense of Washington when McClellan wanted them on the Peninsula. The facts about this "FIRST GREAT CRIME OF THE WAR," as Franklin first called it, are illuminating—and no little astounding.(39)

When Lincoln finally consented that McClellan should move on Richmond by way of the Peninsula, instead of keeping his army between Washington and the Confederate capital, the President stipulated that sufficient troops should be left at Washington to make it secure.(40) Kelley says that Lincoln specifically conditioned that McDowell's corps should be left.(41) After McClellan started on his way with 121,000 troops to meet Johnson's 53,000, it was learned that he had ordered McDowell to follow. Military men who were called in reported that without McDowell's corps the forces left to defend the capital would be dangerously inadequate; and McDowell was instructed by the President to remain at Washington.(41) That this action was justified, both by McClellan's previous and subsequent conduct, and by other considerations, is apparent to even a superficial student.

By that time, many people feared—with some, it amounted to a conviction—that McClellan was disloyal; and that he wished to uncover the capital in such a way as to invite its capture by the enemy, thereby forcing a compromise settlement.(42) The President did not share in this suspicion of McClellan, but he knew of it; and he would have been criminally negligent if he had not taken whatever measures might be necessary to prevent such a contingency. One of Lee's biographers says Lee believed that the surest way to induce the North to abandon the struggle was to seize the Federal capital; and that, even when defending Richmond, Lee always kept an eye on Washington.(43)

Lincoln knew that a defeat in the field could be repaired; but that, under conditions then existing, a loss of the capital would be fatal.

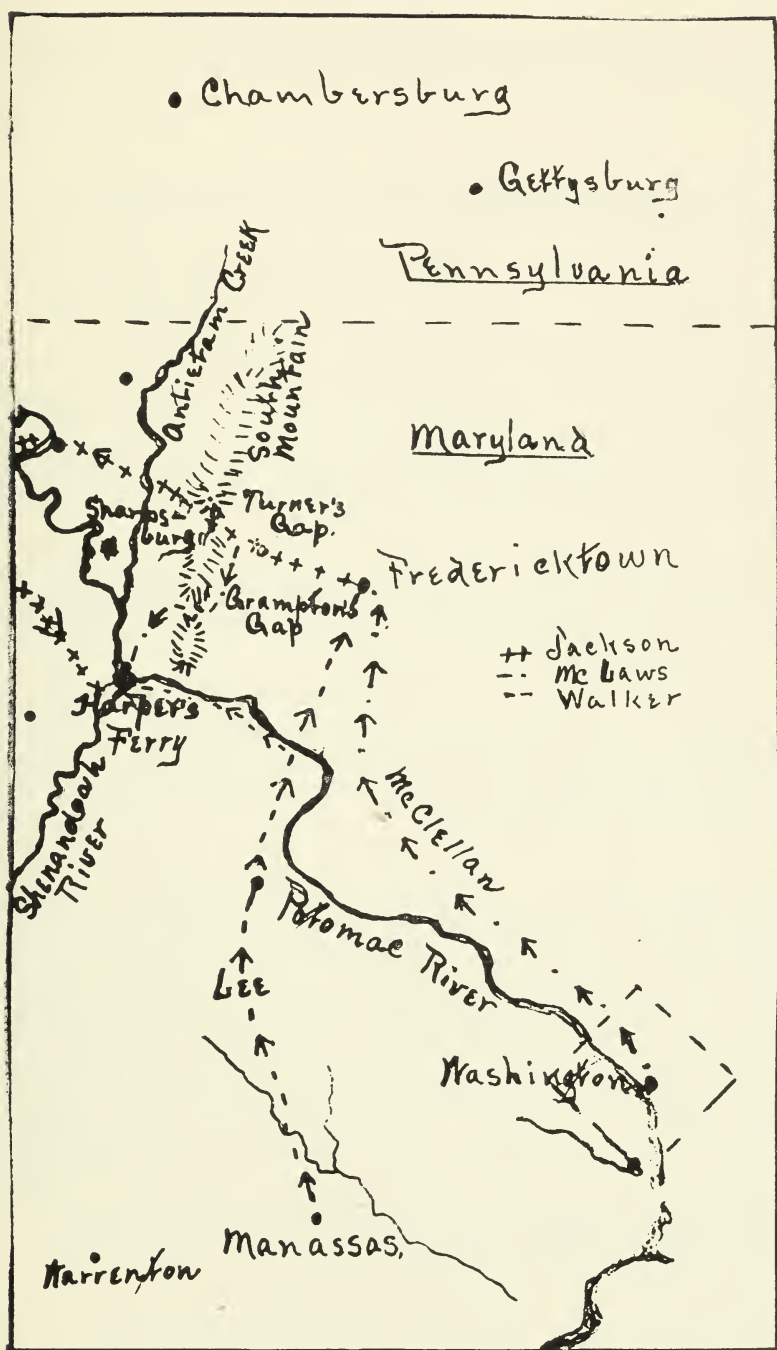
As a matter of fact, after other troops had reached Washington, Franklin and McCall's divisions of McDowell's corps were sent to the Peninsula, leaving only about 18,000 soldiers that were finally retained.(44) How little difference it would have made in the results attained on the Peninsula by McClellan whether or not any or all of McDowell's corps (or an additional one of the same size) was sent to him is indicated by other circumstances.

Milton recapitulates by saying that a total of 160,000 soldiers were furnished McClellan for the Peninsula campaign; that McClellan's report of July 7 showed 86,000 present; that of the 73,500 missing, not over 23,000 were casualties; leaving 50,000 to be accounted for largely by McClellan's over-generous granting of furloughs.(45) That number is 30,000 more than all the men he failed to receive. Small wonder that McClellan was popular with his troops, or that Lincoln once said that sending reinforcements to McClellan was like trying to move fleas across a floor with a shovel.

. . .

If, after all of McClellan's delays, and his prima donna tactics, Lincoln had dismissed him when he refused to attack Magruder at the opening of the Peninsular campaign, and had been fortunate in the choice of a successor, the Union army probably would have captured Richmond within ten days, and have won the war. Freeman believes that, taken in connection with other reverses, the Confederacy could scarcely have survived the loss of its capital at that time.(46) The loss of Richmond, and the defeat of their Eastern army, simultaneously with the defeats which the Confederates suffered in the West, should have been determinative.

Anyway, Lincoln seems to have learned a lesson; for, about a year later, when General Hooker, while in close contact with the enemy, displayed a McClellan temperament, Lincoln instantly ac-



Maryland Campaign

cepted his resignation, and appointed Meade to command. Meade won the battle of Gettysburg, and the Confederacy waned from that hour.(47)

. . .

After his defeat at Gaines' Mill, at the beginning of the Seven Days Battle, on the Peninsula, McClellan said in a telegram to the Secretary of War:

If I save this army now, I tell you plainly that I owe nothing to you or any other persons in Washington. You have done your best to sacrifice this Army.(48)

"Any other persons," of course, include all the villains at Washington, particularly the President, who made all final decisions.

Among McClellan devotees, "THE FIRST GREAT CRIME OF THE WAR" has been a favorite heading for chapters dealing with Lincoln's detention of McDowell's corps.

The use by a recent biographer of "MCCELLELLAN'S DEMOTION ASSISTS LEE" as a chapter heading is a not-too-subtle suggestion that, in demoting McClellan, Lincoln was giving aid to the enemy, especially Lee. In the text, this writer says that there was "obstruction" and "opposition" to McClellan from start to finish. (49)

Another writer says that the President and Stanton consented to McClellan's plan of attack by way of the Peninsula with reluctance; and immediately after it commenced, began to take those measures which resulted in its failure.(50)

. . .

Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States and Commander-in-Chief of the army, either wished McClellan to succeed, and did all that he believed he safely could do to help McClellan succeed, or he did not. If he did not, it must be admitted, I suppose, that (1) he was ignorant and weakly allowed himself to be swayed by others; or (2) he was a traitor to his country in deliberately aiding its enemies; or (3) he was malicious; or (4) he was all of these things. I hasten to say that I believe that there is not a scintilla of evidence which indicates that he was any of them; and I doubt if anything but an overwhelming desire to glorify McClellan could induce anyone to make such charges, even by implication. I believe further that Mr. Lincoln told the truth when he stated in his famous letter to General Hooker that he had supported all previous commanders to the utmost of his ability.

. . .

In a recent work, *Lincoln, the President*, so good in many

respects that a committee of distinguished experts pronounced it "The Lincoln Book of the Year," Dr. J. G. Randall devoted fifty-seven pages to a McClellan apologetic, and he thereby, as I believe, disparaged Lincoln.

Dr. Randall closes his (to me) unconvincing argument by dramatically telling that a recent biographer informs us that General Lee once said "emphatically" that McClellan was "by all odds" the ablest Federal general whom he had opposed.

That was disconcerting; but not believing that General Lee ever did, or would, make such a statement, I determined to run the matter down. I found that Dr. Randall quoted Freeman; that Freeman quoted R. E. Lee, Jr.; and that R. E. Lee, Jr., in a book published in 1904, disclosed that Cazenove Lee, a second cousin of General Lee's, thought he remembered that Lee made such a statement in a private conversation—thirty-four years previously.

In an untactful moment, after Lee's death, General Grant said that he rated General Joseph E. Johnston higher as a military man than General Lee; and that, naturally, was not pleasing to the Lee family.

By a study of Freeman's *R. E. Lee*, one can gain a hint as to how Lee *did* evaluate McClellan. That author tells how Lee left but 30,000 troops to keep 85,000 of McClellan's out of Richmond by bluffing, while the bulk of Lee's army defeated Fitz-John Porter's 25,000 soldiers then stationed north of the Chickahomony River; he opines that during the Seven Days Battle, McClellan was not far from panic; and he says that Lee could not have wished for an opponent in a worse frame of mind, or one more likely to "bewilder" an administration that was depending on such a commander.(51) He tells us, too, that when, just before the Battle of Antietam, General John G. Walker could not conceal his astonishment at the apparent recklessness of Lee's plans, Lee quietly asked him if he was "acquainted with" McClellan.(52) He also says that Lee regretted McClellan's final dismissal because Lee feared that the administration at Washington might eventually select a commander whom he could not "understand" as he did McClellan.(53)

In his generally-splendid biography of McClellan, Macartney says that, in Maryland, Lee seemed "almost rashly indifferent" to the Union army, then led by McClellan, although it was twice the size of his own.(54) Lee had known McClellan since they worked together in the Mexican War, and thoroughly understood McClellan's idiosyncracies.

Dr. Randall also assures us that never did the Union army under McClellan suffer a major defeat.(55)

After the Battle of Gaines' Mill, McClellan said in a dispatch to Washington.

I know that a few thousand more troops would have changed this defeat into a victory.(56)

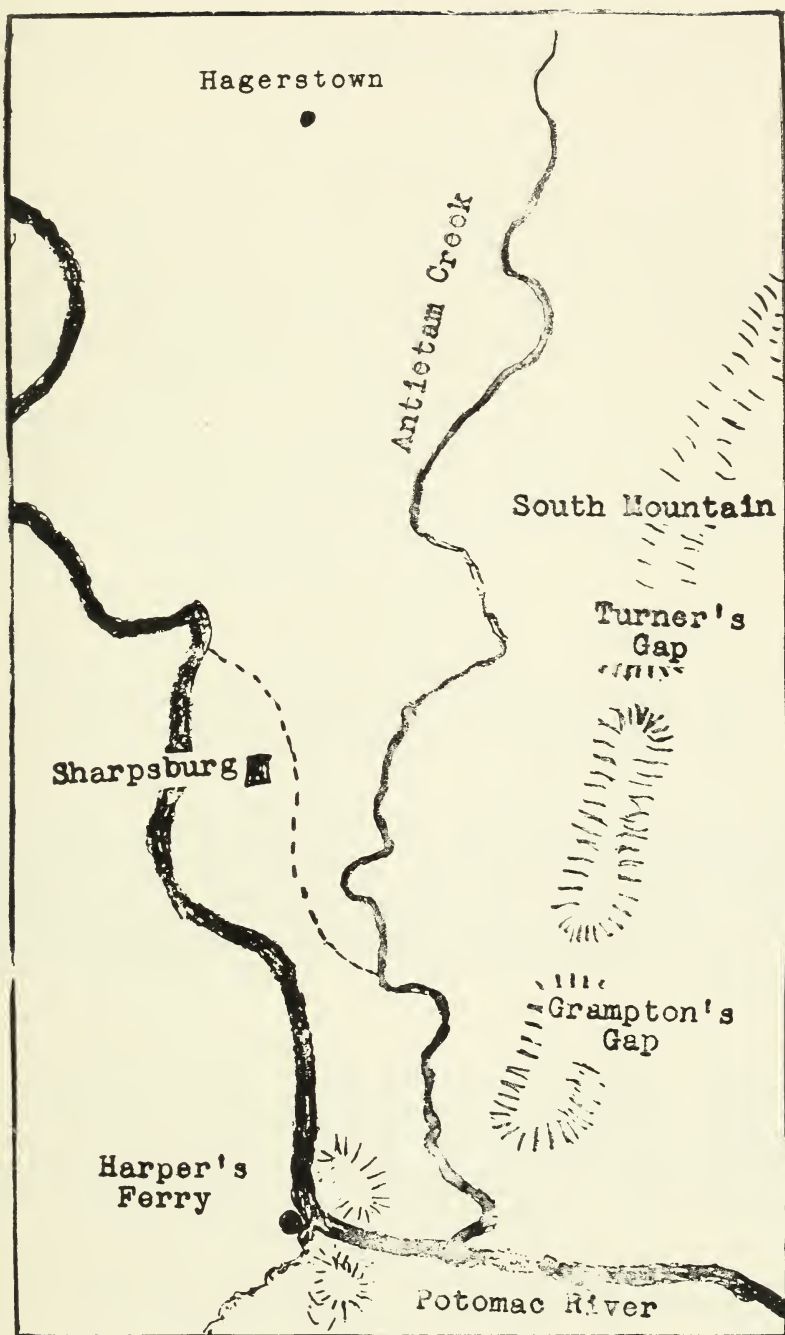
McClellan said he had been defeated; and he then continued to retreat until he had reached the protection of the gunboats on the James River, fighting rearguard actions all the way; and losing, altogether, immense stores, a hospital, fifty-two cannon, 1,700 men killed, 8,000 wounded, and 6,000 as prisoners.(57) Immediately after they reached the James, his chief-of-staff went to Washington and discussed the possibility that McClellan might have to surrender his entire army to Lee; and McClellan reported to the President that he considered the situation of his army as "critical".(58)

On his way up the Peninsula, and when he finally reached White House, on the Pamunkey River, McClellan established a supply base; and the government unstintingly stocked it with supplies which the army might need. After McClellan's defeat at Gaines' Mill, and while he was hastily preparing to retreat to the James River—he called it "a change of base"—the depot at White House must, of course, be abandoned. General Jeb Stuart, who arrived there while the stores were being destroyed, described what happened in a report to the Confederate government. One short extract will suffice:

Nine large barges, laden with stores, were on fire as we approached; immense numbers of tents, wagons, and cars in long trains, loaded, and five locomotives; a number of forges; quantities of every species of quartermaster's stores and property, making a total of many millions of dollars—all more or less destroyed.(59)

At the same time, up at the front, many soldiers, preparing for the proposed retreat, were also destroying supplies. Rhodes says that great heaps of quartermaster's stores were destroyed on the ground; that trains of boxcars, loaded with ammunition, shells for big guns, and other supplies of all kinds, were attached to locomotives; and that these trains then, under a full head of steam, were run into the river.(60)

To an amateur historian and student, all of that taken together would seem to include every element of a major defeat. A panic on Wall Street and current newspaper comments indicate such was the general opinion over the country at that time.



Antietam

The Hon. William D. Kelley, heretofore mentioned, told of a long and intimate conversation which he had with Mr. Lincoln early in October, 1862. During this conversation, as Kelley tells us:

Mr. Lincoln deplored this failure (at Antietam) to achieve the decisive results which he said he believed had been clearly within McClellan's grasp * * *. He had, he said, restored him (McClellan) to command to reorganize a broken and demoralized army * * *. Mr. Lincoln admitted that McClellan, by incessant, and frequently unfounded complaints * * * had done much to destroy the morale of his troops, and that he had wantonly sacrificed Pope * * *. He said with much deliberation, that he believed the restoration to command of McClellan, Porter, and other chiefs, in the face of treasonable misconduct of which they had been so flagrantly guilty in the sacrifice of Pope's army, was the greatest trial and most painful duty of his official life. 'I am now,' he said, 'stronger with the Army of the Potomac than McClellan. The troops know * * * that neither Stanton nor I withheld anything from him at Antietam, and that it was not the administration, but their own former idol, who surrendered the just results of their terrible sacrifices, and closed the fight as a drawn battle, when, had he thrown Porter's corps of fresh men, and other available troops, upon Lee's army, he would inevitably have driven it in disorder to the river and captured most of it before sunset'.(60)

Which raises the question as to how much of Lincoln's delay in dismissing McClellan was caused by a hope that McClellan would redeem himself, and how much by a fear that the Eastern army might follow McClellan in a revolt. That Lincoln, thereafter, continued to be stronger with the army than McClellan is indicated by the soldiers vote in 1864, when three out of four of them voted for Lincoln.

. . .

One of the most characteristic astounding, and illuminating incidents in McClellan's career, as it seems to me, is told by a recent biographer. On September 13, 1862, McClellan received a copy of Lee's lost order which disclosed that much of Lees' army had gone to Harper's Ferry. A part of what was left held two gaps of South Mountain. Not starting until the 14th, McClellan, that day, cleared the gaps. On the 15th, Lee took a position on Antietam Creek, only seven miles from the gaps, with the 18,000 troops that had remained with him. If McClellan, with his 87,000 troops, had attacked Lee's small force on the 15th, he could easily have captured it, probably

before night; and he then could have defeated in detail, and probably have captured, the other portions of Lee's army. Instead, he did little on the 15th and practically nothing on the 16th, while Lee's scattered forces returned and took position. McClellan had decided to fight on the 17th. He completed all arrangements by ten o'clock on the night of the 16th, then went to bed and slept until eight o'clock the next morning.(62)

Immediately following this battle, McClellan received reinforcements which more than replaced his losses. Lee's army was now reduced to about 30,000 effectives. Even after McClellan had let Lee escape across the river, Lincoln begged him, while he had nearly three times Lee's forces, to follow Lee relentlessly, and win a final decision; but all his pleadings were to no purpose.(63)

Lincoln appears to have believed confidently that immediately after Antietam, McClellan, with his overwhelming force, could scarcely have failed to have captured Lee and to have ended the conflict, if he had but made an effort. Believing that he must have felt ever afterward that all the sacrifices and casualties of the next two years were unnecessary. Not much wonder, perhaps, that Lincoln appeared to age twenty years between 1860 and 1865.

. . .

Probably it was fortunate for McClellan, possibly for the country, that with his exaggerated ego, martyr complex, and his propensity for quarreling with his superiors, not to mention the political influences which surrounded him, he lacked Benedict Arnold's decisiveness and headlong courage. One of McClellan's biographers states that he often received the suggestion that his popularity with the Eastern army would make it easy for him to depose the administration, and play the role of dictator. That he toyed with the idea is indicated by two incidents. Riding with some officers on the Peninsula, he mentioned the ease with which he believed he could take over the government; and he appeared offended when he was told that, while his soldiers loved him, they would never follow him in such a treasonable project.(64) At a dinner which he gave at his headquarters on September 24, 1862, he asked a group of officers what they thought about the practicability of his opposing the Emancipation Proclamation, stating that he believed the army was so devoted to him that it would enforce any decision that he might make.(65) Again he received no encouragement; and when, a few weeks later, he was dismissed, he quietly turned the command over to Burnside, and went to his home without any untoward incident.

. . .

Whether McClellan's failures were the result of his own inherent

weaknesses, or whether, taking counsel of his political ambitions, and influenced by his associates, he deliberately avoided a victorious decision, as claimed by Major Key, he, by the irony of fate, played right into the hands of those Radicals who were unwilling that the war should close without the abolition of slavery, its principal cause. Every disappointment and defeat moved the Conservatives, including Lincoln, farther toward the position of the extreme Radicals. The effect on foreign and domestic public opinion of McClellan's and Pope's disasters forced Lincoln to play his "last card"—Emancipation.

The tides which control the destinies of men are more powerful than any man, party, or administration. Perhaps that was what Lincoln meant when he wrote to Hodges: "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me." It is an axiomatic truth that "Man proposes and Fate disposes." Mr. Lincoln may have had something like that thought in mind when he said in his Second Inaugural Address:

Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict itself would cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.

. . .

McClellan, of course, had some good qualities. Otherwise, he never would have been graduated from West Point second in his class, nor have been sent to the Crimea as a military observer, nor have attained the presidency of even a small railroad. While he had limitations and weaknesses which probably precluded his ever becoming a great general or a successful politician, if he had been fortunate enough to have had with him such a steadying influence as Grant found in General Rawlins, instead of a Copperhead father-in-law, he might have been a useful soldier, and a credit to the country. He was not the only general who failed, who used bad political judgment, or who was dilatory; and if claims were not now made for him which discredit those who really won the war, most of us—conscious of our own limitations, weaknesses, and faults—would be glad to concede to him any honors which may be due him, wrap in a mantle of charity every unpleasant phase of his character, and forget all the incidents in his life which we should not like to have remembered in our own lives.

NUMBER OF OPPOSING TROOPS

	<i>McClellan</i>	<i>Johnson</i>
Washington,		
July 27, 1861 (<i>Rhodes</i> , iii, 492-97) . . .	52,000	34,000
December 1, 1861 (<i>Rhodes</i> , iii, 497) . .	169,000	47,000

(YORKTOWN)

	<i>McClellan</i>	<i>Magruder</i>
Peninsula,		
May 10, 1862 (<i>Rhodes</i> , iii, 615; iv. 2-3)	100,000	11,000

(FAIR OAKS)

	<i>McClellan</i>	<i>Johnson</i>
May 31, 1862 (<i>Rhodes</i> , iv, 24)	100,000	63,000

(SEVEN DAYS BATTLE)

	<i>McClellan</i>	<i>Lee</i>
June 26, 1862		
(<i>Rhodes</i> , iv, 24-44, note)	100,000*	85,000

(ANTIETAM)

Maryland,		
September 17, 1862		
(<i>Freeman</i> , 358, 383)	87,000	40,000#

Compare: *Rhodes*, iv, 153; *Johnson*, 81-84, 109, 383; *McClellan* (a), 237-38; (b), 9; *Webb*, 5, 7, 26, 49, 97, 119-20; *Milton*, 206-10; *Committee Report*, 4; *Palfrey*, 68-69; *Freeman*, ii, 116; *Ropes*, 159, 336.

* *McClellan's Report*, June 20, 1862:

Present for duty	115,102
Sick, Under Arrest, Etc.	12,225
Absent	29,511

156,838

Rhodes generously estimates *Lee's* forces at Antietam at 55,000; *Livermore*, 52,000. But *Ropes* says that *Lee* started north with "not over" 55,000. Several authorities estimate that battle losses and unusually heavy straggling had reduced *Lee's* forces before Antietam to between 35,000 and 40,000 soldiers. *Freeman* states that an Antietam *Lee* had 36,000 infantry, and a total of less than 40,000. In his official report, *Lee* says he had less than 40,000.

The Substance
of
OPINIONS
held by
SOME LEADING HISTORIANS

McClure:

McClellan was the greatest organizer and defensive officer of the age, but the Union cause demanded swift and terrible blows. Grant met this want. (219)

Webb:

As usual, McClellan was grossly and persistently deceived regarding the number of troops opposed to him on the Peninsula. (187-88)

Blaine:

The Peninsula Campaign was a succession of deferred hopes, disappointments, and sacrifices of hopes and treasures; it ended in positive disaster, and a humiliating defeat. The opinion of a majority of intelligent observers, both civil and military, is that McClellan was a man of high professional training, admirably skilled in the science of war, capable of commanding a large army with success, but at the same time, not original in plan, not fertile in resource, and lacking the energy, the alertness, the daring and the readiness to take great risks for great ends, which distinguish the military leaders of the world. (*i*, 451)

Palfrey:

At Antietam, McClellan was not equal to the occasion. It may be said that he did better than Pope, but such faint praise is the best that can be said for him on this important occasion. (41)

Milton:

McClellan's failures were chiefly caused by his own inner infirmities. (*a*, 113)

Macartney:

McClellan had many remarkable military talents; and if he had possessed courage and dash, he might have won a great victory and an early peace. As Greeley has reminded us, a higher wisdom than that of either McClellan or the Radical Republicans was at work, and Lincoln providentially both saved the Union and freed it from the blight of slavery. (*viii*, 213-14)

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Macartney, 59-63; Rhodes, iii, 436-42.
2. Milton (a), 102-4; Macartney, 100-2; Webb, 2-5.
3. Rhodes, iii, 490-501; Webb, 5-8; Macartney, 87-93; McClure, 216-21; Milton (a), 102, 237; Battles & Leaders, ii, 112-13.
4. Milton (a), 100-20; Macartney, 97, 129-45; Rhodes, iv, 50-51.

Organization and drill, the things in which McClellan excelled, may have been as important as we have been led to believe; but when one considers that the Army of the Potomac was four years in reaching and taking Richmond, at a distance of about one-hundred miles; and that in less than a year, Sherman's roughnecks fought and marched between six-hundred and seven-hundred miles, taking Atlanta, Savannah, Columbia, and other towns on the way, while going to the assistance of the Eastern army, one wonders.

5. McClellan (a), 225; Rhodes, iii, 498-99; Macartney, 132-45.

Of all his father's family, McClellan appears to have loved himself the best. Near the last of October, 1861 (*Battles & Leaders*, ii, 435), when he already had over 76,000 effectives, he recommended that operations in all other quarters be confined to the defensive, and that all surplus troops be sent to him; but when Rosecrans asked for reinforcements (*Nicolay & Hay*, v, 154) McClellan was "shocked" at such an unreasonable request.

6. Macartney, 133-34, 149; Webb, 17-33; Milton (a), 119-20; Nicolay & Hay, v, 148-49, 160-72, 181-84.
7. McClellan (a), 237-38; Milton (a), 194-210; Rhodes, iii, 615-17; iv, 2-43; Freeman, ii, 230; Nicolay & Hay, v, 181-84, 358-91.

Freeman tells (ii, 18) about one method which Magruder with only 11,000 men, employed to enable him to hold McClellan's whole army for nearly a month in front of Yorktown. A body of soldiers marched across a road in plain view of the Federals, disappeared into the woods, circled around, and crossed the road again, time after time. That gave McClellan the impression that a host of Confederate troops were marching into position; and he made the welkin ring with cries for reinforcements.

8. Webb, 118-90; Macartney, 178-97; Milton (a), 206-17; Rhodes, iv, 40-49; Nicolay & Hay, v, 413-40.

A number of historians, including Rhodes (iv, 48, *note*),

perhaps to illustrate McClellan's naive carelessness in making statements, tell that immediately after his retreat to Harrison's Landing, he reported to both Lincoln and Stanton that he had lost but one gun, a slight error of fifty-one guns. Later, he raised the ante to twenty-five.

On pages 237 and 238 of *McClellan's Own Story*, under date of April 5, 1862, is the report of John Tucker, Assistant Secretary of War, showing that he had just completed delivering to the Peninsula for McClellan 121,500 soldiers. McClellan reported that he had 108,000 effectives. This was followed closely by another report which indicated that he had only 85,000. In regard to a letter from Mr. Lincoln, dated April 9, 1862, asking what had become of the apparently-missing 23,000, McClellan says (*Own Story*, 278) that it is "sufficient to say" that the latter estimate was made from his "latest returns" of those "present for duty."

9. Rhodes, iv, 111-36; Milton (a), 238-42; Nicolay & Hay, vi, 1-29.
10. Wells, 192-98; Rhodes, iv, 135-37; Milton (a), 242-43; Battles & Leaders, ii, 551.
11. Macartney, 236-37; Palfrey, 19-29; Rhodes, iv, 143-45.
12. Rhodes, iv, 146-53; Macartney, 251-71; Palfrey, 30-81; Davis, 338.
13. Macartney, 251-71; Rhodes, iv, 149-53; Palfrey, 127-28.
14. Rhodes, iv, 147; Palfrey, 26; Macartney, 249.
15. Freeman, ii, 415-19; Maurice, 158-65.
16. Rhodes, iv, 184-87; Nicolay & Hay, vi, 173-96; Browning, i, 590.

Alexander K. McClure, whom Mr. Lincoln once said had "more brain power" than any other man he had ever known, was one of Lincoln's most intimate friends at Washington. In his *Lincoln and Men of War Times* (pp. 203-22), McClure claims that he felt very friendly toward McClellan, and believed that later commanders had some advantage because of McClellan's experiences. He also believed, however, that McClellan's insinuation that Lincoln was unfriendly were "unjust," a "fatal error," and "monstrous." McClure says that Lincoln longed for the earliest possible victory, and that he earnestly hoped that McClellan would win laurels for himself by succeeding.

17. Macartney, 290-92; Rhodes, iv, 188; Wells, 198.

Writing from Warsaw, Illinois, under date of October 28, 1862, John Hay said (*Dennett* 51-52) that McClellan's reten-

tion in command of the Eastern army had begun to "shake the confidence" of the West in the government, and that he had not heard a single man defend McClellan.

18. Milton (a), 160-82; Rhodes, iii, 581-93, 629.
19. McClure, 196; Rhodes, iii, 628; Milton (a), 299.
20. McClellan (a), 82.
21. *Ibid.* 168.
22. *Ibid.* 169.
23. *Ibid.* 175.
24. *Ibid.* 176.
25. *Ibid.* 453.
26. *Ibid.* 225.
27. *Ibid.* 310.
28. *Ibid.* 308.
29. *Ibid.* 317.
30. *Ibid.* 407.

Don Piatt opines (*pp.* 280-81) that *McClellan's Own Story* is its author's undoing, and depressive to the reader, because it destroys all conclusions in the author's favor, and reveals him as a singularly weak character; that one shudders who remembers that a hundred thousand men, perhaps a government, were subject to peril at the hands of such a man.

31. Williams, 78; Bates, 106-7; Julian, 251.

While Thomas Eckert was temporarily in charge of the telegraph office at Fort Monroe, as Bates (*p.* 103-5) tells us, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee sent McClellan, then at White House, several long messages advising him to ignore the Administration and act on his own judgment. Eckert refused to forward such messages over the wires, but delivered them in person. McClellan was appreciative for the consideration shown him by Eckert, and claimed that he had not received any other messages of such a treasonable character.

Donn Piatt (*pp.* 291-95) believed that Colonel Thomas M. Key, brother of the Major John J. Key who was dismissed from the service for treasonable utterances, was another "evil genius" on McClellan's staff. Colonel Key, whom Piatt knew personally,

had, Piatt says, a deep-seated contempt for the administration; possessed and controlled McClellan without the latter realizing it; and, while honestly trying to make McClellan a great political oracle, only succeeded in making him a military failure. Piatt believed, however, that the very weaknesses which prevented McClellan from becoming a successful military man precluded his ever becoming an active traitor; and that this fact was realized by both Lincoln and Seward.

32. Milton (b), 117, 216, 245.
33. Macartney, 198-200; Official Records, I, II, pt. 1, p. 48; Julian, 193-98.
34. McClellan (a), 487-89; Macartney, 198-200.
35. Dennett, 50-51; Macartney, 295; Nicolay & Hay, vi, 186-87.
36. Macartney, 295-96; Kelley, 68; Nicolay & Hay, vi, 188.
37. Kelley, 62; Macartney, 305.
38. Kelley, 6.
39. An article entitled "The First Great Crime of the War," by General W. B. Franklin, in *The Annals of the War*, Philadelphia, 1879.
40. Committee Report, 7; Rhodes, iii, 615; Kelley, 34; Milton (a), 120.
41. Kelley, 34; Rhodes, iii, 615; Committee Report, 8-9; Nicolay & Hay, v, 184.
42. Macartney, 144-45; McClellan (a), 195-96; Nicolay & Hay, v, 169; Browning, i, 537-39.
43. Maurice, 83.
44. Rhodes, iv, 4, 32; Committee Report, 14; Webb, 61, 119-21.

On page 89, vol. 2, text and note, of his *Lincoln, the President*, Dr. Randall says that, on April 7, 1862, McClellan "stated" that he had 85,000 troops "for duty"; that McClellan then moved up the Peninsula to meet Lee with 85,000 troops. Dr. Randall, however, does not mention that McClellan had already received 36,000 more troops than he "stated" he had "for duty," and that 40,000 additional troops were sent to him.

According to the Committee Report, (p. 12), on June 20, immediately before McClellan met Lee in the Seven Days Battle, McClellan's own returns to the Adjutant-General's office gave the strength of his army as: Present for duty, 115,102; special

duty, sick and in arrest, 12,225; absent 29,000—total 156,838.

45. Milton (a), 237; Nicolay & Hay, v, 453-54.

In a letter to President Lincoln, written soon after the Seven Days Battle, McClellan said that 34,472 soldiers belonging to his army were absent "with authority." (*O. R., I, III, pt. 3, p. 319*)

46. Freeman, ii, 22; iv, 169.

47. Rhodes, iv, 280; Milton (a), 266-67.

48. McClellan (b), 131; Rhodes, iv, 43-44; Official Records, I, XI, pt. 1, p. 61.

49. Dr. J. G. Randall in *Lincoln, the President* (ii, 87).

50. Macartney, 143.

Rhodes says (*iii*, 616) that Lincoln's letter of April 9, 1862 to McClellan is "pathetic" in its revelation of how much Lincoln wished the general to succeed, and the length he was willing to go to promote that success. Rhodes further opines (*iv*, 50) that it is no longer necessary to prove, hardly to state, that both Lincoln and Stanton ardently and sincerely desired that McClellan should succeed.

51. Freeman, ii, 242-431. See, also: Webb, 134-35; Maurice, 115; Rhodes, iv, 40; Milton (a), 206; Jones, i, 138.

52. Freeman, ii, 362.

53. *Ibid.*, 428.

54. Macartney, 237.

55. *Lincoln, the President*, ii, 69.

56. McClellan (a), 424-25; Macartney, 186.

57. Webb, 136-66; Milton (a), 212-20; Rhodes, iv, 44-53.

58. Macartney, 198-200; McClellan (a), 487-89; Nicolay & Hay, v, 443; Browning, i, 559.

59. Davis, ii, 150-51.

60. Rhodes, iv, 39-46; Webb, 136-37.

61. Kelley, 72.

62. Macartney, 265; Palfrey, 20-72; Battles & Leaders, ii, 559-81, 603, 630-82.

63. Rhodes, iv, 184-88; Webb, 130; Macartney, 280-92.

64. Macartney, 298; Piatt, 293-94.

That those who opposed the administration and supported McClellan in the 1864 campaign did so from widely different motives is indicated in the *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention* (1864) in extracts made from speeches delivered by Long of Ohio and Powell of Kentucky:

"Although I am opposed to McClellan — although I think he is the worst man you could put on the ticket * * * I expect to * * * cast my vote with my friends."

"* * * and, sir, as a peace man who has opposed this war from the beginning, never having voted a man or a dollar to carry it on, * * * I believe that General McClellan * * * should receive my warm, hearty, zealous support."

Palfrey (p. 47) says it is impossible to believe that McClellan really supposed that on the Peninsula or in Maryland the Confederates had the forces which he attributed to them. Nicolay & Hay (vi, 188) say that before the end of October 1862, Lincoln began to believe that McClellan had no real desire to beat the enemy.

If over-estimating the enemy, under-stating his own forces, furloughing wastefully, demanding impossible reinforcements, preparing advance alibis, blaming the administration for his failures, and failing to grasp easy victories, were all parts of a political comedy, the 25,000 casualties on the Peninsula and at Antietam, could they know it, probably would not consider the drama too amusing.

Some of us would like to believe that but very little praise or condemnation is due any of those connected with the Civil War drama, because the opinions and sympathies which governed the actions of each participant, from the rabid Abolitionists of New England to the Fire-eater of the Deep South, were the inevitable consequence of the innate qualities which he had inherited from his ancestors, as modified or supplemented by his environment and his teachings; that, as Lincoln seemed to feel, Providence, Fate, the Logic of Events — whatever it is that determines the final destinies of men and nations — used all of these participants to secure eventually the right solution of their common problem.

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